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Spring 1997

The John Carroll Review

Spring 1997

**A Publication of
John Carroll University**

This issue is dedicated to Mark Winegardner.

The John Carroll Review

Spring 1997

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Welcome to the spring issue of *The John Carroll Review*.

In our continuing efforts to create a readable, enjoyable and "literary" magazine, we have shifted gears this semester and included more poetry than the previous issue. Also, the "fiction" submissions this time around were difficult to label as such, so we decided to simply lose the genre classifications on the table of contents page.

Your suggestions are greatly appreciated, and we encourage our readers to send along more comments and criticisms to the new editorial staff for the fall issue. And, as always, we encourage submissions of literary and artistic materials.

We would like to thank the staff of the *Carroll Review*. We love you all equally and appreciate your dedication. Please keep in touch. As for the contributors, we appreciate your submissions and look forward to seeing and reading future work from you all.

Finally, a tearful thanks to Mark Winegardner, an inspiration and the wind beneath our wings. Wear sunblock, Mark.

Melissa Zagata
John R. Panza
Christine Dresch

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Michael P. Graham

Dreaming

You never saw them where I grew
Up. In the suburbs they were
Only on Thursday night T.V.--Cosby.
And when I heard that
Word when I was young,
I could only wonder why
My uncles spit it out with
Their Copenhagen tobacco.

Sometimes, I do a drive-
By along Woodhill Rd., near
E. 55. The cemetery faces
The projects with grave
Stones that look more
Inviting than the homes.
Both stretch like arms reaching
For infinity.

Once I took a wrong
Turn, down a street not
On the map, with houses no
One bothered to condemn. I passed
A garden of tires and saw a child
With his arms spread as if he could
Fly, his eyes all caught
Up in the sky.

Trishalana Kopaitich

I'm only here
for a cup of coffee
while I read.
And a few cigarettes.
I don't care to discuss
Yeats or Lawrence right
now because I need
to read them first.

An opinionated woman, or
an oxymoron, right? Yes,
funny, and true, sir.
We all do think.
How those thoughts are filtered
is a matter of breeding.

All the button-down
shirts and ties suggest
manhood. Look closer.
The men are running
it while the women run
around it with a sweeper.
Disgusted, I leave.

I head to work.
"We hire girls
because they don't fuck
around."
--First time I heard that.
On slow nights, I
create my own "feather
duster scenes" across
the classics shelves.

In between customers,
Julianne touches up her
lipstick for the next
unsuspecting man. She's
27 and feels
she needs to. Cleaning
has just about worn
me out, so much so that I
would love a cigarette.

As I walk toward the door,
a young man enters. Smiling,
he holds the door for me.
A chivalric breeze hesitates,
then, caresses my
fingertips. Yes, it
is lovely weather, and
smilingly, thank you
very much.

Eileen Conner
a poetic ladder

stretching its bald skin over
your eyes. you climb knowing
how and when to go. it
happens sometimes. quick
words through your pen scramble
up and out into the light. climbing
you reach the end, the centerfold
taut knowledge in your head
race through your energy blood
scars showing themselves for the only time
mind dilating glows a fertile
expansion. it happens sometimes that
you cant catch up with them.

Conceding she could finally bear to open it, Mom let me excavate the far corner of the garage, where I unearthed the drum under folded lawn chairs and a plastic tablecloth, its tulip pattern long ago scrubbed to pale yellow smears. She fussed while I rolled the sealed cylinder on its rim down the drive and onto her little patio. "It's so heavy! It's too heavy for you!"

While she tried to pry up the lid, I thought of Carter about to open a hole in the door to Tut's tomb--and hated myself for such a dramatic connection. The air inside the drum, about to mingle with sweet June breezes in a southern Ohio town, was fifty years old. And then I didn't want her to open it.

After the funeral I had been put in a car with old aunts I didn't even know. "Did you clean your nostrils?" one asked. "When you're in a railroad town you have to blow your nose all the time."

I had never been to a cemetery. All I knew of dead bodies were my grandfather, and then my father, in open coffins downstairs in Grandma's front room. The lace curtains in the tall windows were stiff and had funny scalloped edges. She showed me once the wood frame bristling with nails, where she stretched the wet curtains to dry.

Daddy had made me go with him to keep him company when Grandpa was dying fast. Why me? Why couldn't I be the one to stay home with mommy? I leaned my head against the car door the whole trip, pretending to sleep. "Jesus Christ, man!" Daddy complained to the state trooper writing the ticket. "My father's dyin'!"

When I saw Daddy's grave, it was already heaped over with dirt. There was a steel pipe sticking up from the dirt at the

head of it. They must have made a hole in the top of his coffin, so when you looked down the pipe you'd see Daddy's face, I thought, terrified. I clung to an aunt's cold, bony hand so I wouldn't look down there.

The drum released a reek of moth balls that stung my nose and made my eyes tear. Mom reached down and pulled out a pair of pants of a color you couldn't name. Daddy's fishing pants. So small I wondered if even I could get into them. I shuddered at the thought of pulling them on. Then a pair of creased brown leather slippers, size 7. Too small for my size 8s. I didn't dare look at Mom in case she was crying. So we brought out boxes of his things: his lettering brushes, the reddish-brown bristles still soft and straight -- and pure sable. Jars of pretty gold and bronze powders. Tubes of printing ink, still malleable. A dingy grey paperback book about lettering and designing posters. A jeweler's magnifying glass with Daddy's initials scratched inside the rim of the black plastic eyepiece. I remember him, bent over watch parts arranged on a velvet cloth, holding that glass in one eye socket just by scrunching his face. One box held watch parts -- a cheap silver-colored mesh band, an empty case for a pocket watch, watches with their little cogs and springs exposed, small but heavy chrome pliers and what looked like tweezers. There was the tennis racket, strung with steel strings, he'd used to win a tennis tournament. There were some odd pieces from a violin -- a bridge, an ebony tuning key, an unopened package of violin strings. "God damn it!" you can still hear him swear on a scratchy record he made of himself playing "Intermezzo." "Damn G-string!" (Mom, the minister's daughter, swore only once in her whole life, when she burned out a string of Christmas lights. And then only because she knew Daddy would swear at her if she didn't.)

"He never let me wash his fishing pants," she said. "He'd get them out every year around March and hang them in the

kitchen doorway." I don't remember them, though they look just like the pants he's always wearing in the Minnesota snapshots, standing with one foot on the edge of the boat and grinning at a stringer full of walleye.

I do remember that big kitchen in New York, with the yellow table and chairs set in the middle. He was sitting there the day his eyes rolled back in his head. When Mom started to run to the phone (the first phone we'd ever had) he lunged at her with an upraised fist. "Don't you dare call the doctor!" he'd threatened. So she didn't. She always did what he said, even the night he came home late and I heard her crying. "Oh, Bob, no! Did you tell her you love her?" I didn't hear him answer, and I turned over to go back to sleep. We'd go away in the morning, for sure, maybe to our aunt's in Ohio. But the next day when I asked her, she seemed surprised. "We're not going to leave Daddy! He said he's sorry."

For some reason they didn't bring him down from upstairs on a stretcher. Maybe the stairway angled too sharply. They carried him down, snoring and unconscious, strapped to one of the yellow chairs. "He's no good," one of them said. How did they know? I wondered. When Mom got home from the hospital she was crying; we were playing with a puppy we'd found. "Will he go to heaven, honey?" she pleaded. "Yes," I lied. She didn't know the rule about missing Sunday Mass. Or about his calling to me from the dark doorway of the bar on the corner as I was walking to church for my confirmation. After, as I walked down the aisle he was slumped against the end of a pew, smiling at me with that sad, sentimental smile he sometimes wore, that almost made you forget his black Irish temper.

"Every time he passed by the pants, he'd bury his nose in them because they smelled like Minnesota," Mom said. I

don't remember that, or any smell of old dead fish. But I do remember the net he knotted for the man who rented us the cabin. It hung in the kitchen doorway, a big metal ring from which long strings coated with pungent beeswax rained down to the floor. Every night during the spring months he'd knot a precise row or two, perfectly straight and even. Mr. Morcom waited every year for Daddy's net. It was knotted so tight no fish could make a hole in it, and that beeswaxed cord never rotted.

The day he made me go in the boat with him and his friend all day, they drank a lot of beer while they trolled and fished. When they had to go to the bathroom they just went in the lake. But he never asked me if I had to go, and I was too embarrassed because of his friend. The sun was turning the lake as vermilion as its name, and the loons had started their cries for help, when we finally got back to the island. He and his friend headed for the ice house, where I knew all the men would drink more beer and make wisecracks while Daddy neatly scraped and filleted the fish for our supper. But I, desperate for relief, ran up the hill to where I could squat in some bushes unseen, angry tears dripping off my chin while urine spattered my legs.

But these are things you don't tell your mother, who is sitting on a lawn chair near the steel drum, her nose buried in a fold of khaki-colored cloth. You don't tell her about coming home from school to find him on the front porch, his black rosary slipping through his fingers while tears ran down his cheeks. One bead, one tear, I remember thinking. You don't tell her that the night he died you were awake all night too and heard everything. Heard him moaning with the terrible headache. Heard his vomit strike the wall between their room and ours. Heard him get up once to go to the bathroom, staggering like a drunk man with heavy steps. I got up and opened the door a crack. He stood bracing himself in the bathroom doorway

opposite, his privates swaying as he tried to keep his balance. I had never seen my father naked, though he used to scandalize my mother by walking in front of the windows in his underwear. "It's my house. If the neighbors wanna look, that's their own damned business!" Now, as he swayed from one foot to the other, the floorboards moved and I, hidden behind my door, felt them move under my own bare feet.

You don't ever tell your mother that you were still awake when the windows lightened in the room you shared with your sister, when you heard Pops, our German landlord, trying to help her wake Daddy. "Bop! Bop!" he yelled, over the loud snoring.

And you don't remind your mother of the morning of the funeral when, after having had to sleep with an aunt you didn't know, who had thrown her bony arm over your body in her sleep, you found your way to the room where your mother was just waking up and beginning to cry, which she did now every morning. This made you impatient, and you demanded, "Aren't we ever going to smile again?"

You don't remind her. Nor do you tell her about the dream. At her sister's house in Ohio all four of us--mom and we three girls--had to sleep in the same bed. It was the year His Holiness was so sick the nuns made us pray novenas for him. In class we had atom bomb drills every week, cowering obediently under our desks. And there was the polio epidemic, and I had terrible pains in my legs. In the dream there were yellow tulips stuck in the steel pipe. I pulled them out and looked down it and Daddy's eyes opened. Then he came to get my mother because he missed her. But as he was running towards her his legs dissolved into dust and he started to cry, holding out his arms as he sank to the ground. It was the same dream every night. Then I would lie awake with the pains in my legs and pray for the Pope and pray to

save Russia and pray for the window to lighten.

What I did, since I couldn't tell her any of those things, was ask if I could have the heavy chrome pliers and the fine sable brushes and the magnifying glass, though I cannot yet bring myself to try to hold it in my eye. I think it may never lose the strong reek of moth balls, which seems to have chemically bonded with the black plastic eyepiece.

And I made sure to tell her of last month's miracle -- of the single pale yellow tulip, the slimmest of champagne flutes, that bloomed from one of Daddy's bulbs she had unearthed and brought from New York. A bulb rooted six feet down and two states and fifty years away from him. And though tulips aren't usually fragrant, this one scented the air with a pungent suggestion of something like beeswax.

Angelle

Feline Enthusiasm

Am I the cat that walks across your morning paper
Or paws and nuzzles you to command attention
As I throw my head back
And relax my neck muscles
Thoroughly trusting to the palm of your hand
Vulnerable and in need
Subjected to the dictates of your Will and Mercy

And sometimes as I sit on your lap
My claws knead your skin
As a gesture of affection
And an experience of pleasure

Once again I am brushed aside
The claws have inadvertently broken the skin
Feline enthusiasm gets a little out of hand
And the morning paper must be read
And there is not enough time to pet the cat today

Michelle Tackla

Rite of Passage

When I turned twenty-one,
I wanted to celebrate with all the Greek gods,
Dionysus and Bacchus, and a few that were about
forgetting.

I wanted to get you out of me,
where all the risk was realized,
where you owned all that was pleasure
to lips and breast,
so I looked for something cheaper

and I found it.
He left a dark Italy
crawling along the side of my neck,
and a Grecian Isle on my shoulder
and it made me wonder
after he left, standing ridiculous
in a Mickey Mouse night shirt (and that's
really true) about Manifest Destiny
and the dark unexplored continents
beneath all our skin.

You look into his eyes and you feel this warmth develop inside of you. It starts in the depths of your stomach, a feeling of queasiness, nervousness, then a burning sensation as the virus moves through your bloodstream -- traveling to every inside you have. Your face becomes flushed, your fingers and toes start to tingle, your knees start to shake. You put your hand to your cheek as if to stop its hue; instead he takes it before you are able to mask your feeling. This just makes your heart increase its rhythm. He says the words, and your heart jumps from your chest into your throat. You are shocked, nauseous, and beaming with happiness. You shake yourself out of the illusion long enough to respond with the appropriate "I love you, too." He turns, exits the car, and you drive away.

You drove away, all the way home, stopping twice for loss of vision, as your tears were your handicap.

Why should you go? Turn around, hold him. Tell him you love him over and over again. Stop yourself. Stop, and think.

You leave tomorrow. You leave the security of family and friends. Your way of life which you've owned for eighteen years. You leave the smell of your home, your room. The view out your bay window and your bedroom ceiling in the morning. You leave the touch of Mother's shoulder on your wet cheek, and the feeling of Father's arms around you. The taste of fresh cinnamon rolls on Saturday mornings, and hosts at eleven o'clock mass in the church you were baptized in. You leave the sight of friends as you run in from the parking lot, late for your 7:45 class. You leave football games where the smell of brauts lingers on your lips from the tailgate before. You leave the feeling of freedom at three o'clock in the afternoon, as the school bell sounds your release. You leave the words which you heard for the first time tonight, which you will not hear until you come back, and when you

return they may not be waiting. You have to leave the feelings which make your skin change color, and your palms sweat, and your heart race. You leave the sensation of arms hugged around your waist and a sincere peck of the lips crowning your head. The deep conversations and the arguments which end in truthful apologies.

Why are you going? Why are not staying in your cocoon with the warmth of the shell protecting you from all that will hurt and dishearten? You need not venture onto unknown shores, so why have you paid for your voyage?

So you can learn, so you can grow. So you can experience what you never would in your cocoon, so you can meet who you never would in your homeland. You need to leave. It is not a matter of want or a matter of force, it is a necessity of life. Change is a necessity of life. You have changed so much: interests changed, passions changed. But you have evolved all you can in your cocoon. You need to express the ways you have learned through these alterations. Without the security and the background which you have here, you can become a new person. Your past experiences follow you only in your heart. This is why, why you should go. This is the reason for leaving.

Your heart breaks apart like the mesmerizing dashes of the road. The pain leaves a stone in your throat. It will never be the same now that you have gone. Even when you come back, things will be different, you will be different, you will have transformed.

But you want to evolve. There is nothing left for you to become here. The environment has grown stale. The words you said for the first time tonight would grow old and routine in a month. It is better to let them die young -- then they will never have to change.

Michael P. Graham

Postcard

Don't want to be your
Bloody Valentine.
Why don't you wipe my face
Out of your mind
So when you say love
I know you're not thinking of
Me.

I'm waking up from
All of my wet dreams
Breathe in the ocean --
Do you still think of me?
We'd keep on swimming,
But I'd drown you as
I sink.

Jason Gravelle

Pain

I saw a deer run off using only three legs. I have had a paper cut between my fingers before. One time, I was watching television about a Chinese orphanage. That was when I saw a living skeleton chained to a bed. They said his mother died in labor. As I was about to cross Locke Road, I saw a kid get dragged underneath a station wagon for about thirty feet before the car came to a stop. When I lived in L.A., I had a friend who cried all the way home from school and continued some time after that. Her boyfriend had just broken up with her. My best friend never talks about his parents being divorced. On the news, a baby was found in a Detroit dumpster, he was abandoned, naked, and frozen stiff blue. Matt hates having to do the things that he doesn't want to. My neighbor has been living with cancer. My cousin died in an avalanche. I didn't really know him, but my uncle has never not thought of him.

Tanya Grossner

New Clothes / Old Woes

Tell me if it's O.K. to walk my words here
or whether there is another place
to go. I will not go
there then. For "you/they"
do not know me or will
ever and Here is everywhere
for me. This is abstract

you say. What I say

is not coddling bright adjectives
and is not swinging with swaggering verbs
that paint a portrait for the plaintiff's eye.
As defendant I defiantly defend
that my point is partly for those who see
with eyes of pure divinity.

Will you say you see?
Are you the Emperor or me?

I haven't told you the latest with Jim, have I? You won't believe what he's done this time. About three weeks ago I get home from work, and I'd already had a bad day. I mean the day started out rotten because Jackie piped up again about how I never make her breakfast but she's always cooking for me. I've told you about how she harps on this all the time. She said, "All the other women in New York get breakfast in bed sometimes," and I said, "All the other guys in New York get the bathroom in the morning." She uses all the hot water in Rochester, and you don't see me complaining. But Jackie, she's always got to say something about everything. She's never happy.

So, anyway, I got to the shop late, and my boss starts on me about some car I'd worked on the day before. I guess this guy went off on Matt -- you know, the night manager -- about his belts squeaking after he'd just picked it up from the shop. Well I told this guy over the phone that the belts were shot, but he gave me some crap about them being new. You should have seen these things. Stretched all to hell. But he wouldn't let me put new ones on. I bet that even if I'd shown him those things, he still would've put up a fight. He's a college teacher. They don't know anything about practical things, you know.

So after hearing Stan rant all day about how this guy was threatening to take his car to another place -- he can take it to Kansas for all I care -- I go to my truck thinking, hey, it's Wednesday, baseball will be on tonight -- Atlanta and Montreal on ESPN -- I can grab a beer, plop down on the couch and relax. Expos have a good team this year, you know. I'm thinking playoffs. And Alou, well, he'll probably get manager of the year too. Anyway, I knew Jackie wouldn't be home because she goes to that yoga class at the Y every Wednesday. You know she told me I forced her to take it. She said I'm too uptight, too tense. Am I a tense guy? Look at me. I'm as relaxed as can be. All I need is a bottle of beer

and a ball game on the TV. She said I made her tense. Yeah, you wonder how I can get tense with her yapping in my ear all the time.

Well I'm driving home, all content -- see, I can be content -- when I remember Jackie wanted me to pick some stuff up for her. I figured I'd better do this because she'd still be mad from the breakfast thing that morning. I was glad she wouldn't be there when I got home. Peace for a little while at least.

So I got home, pads and a six pack in the trunk, and you know what I see? Jim fertilizing my lawn. My lawn. I mean I know this guy's obsessed with gardening--I always see him digging up plants and bushes and moving them around his yard. Like this yucca for instance. He must've moved this yucca from his front yard to the back yard back to the front yard at least ten times now. Last time I looked it was in the back again. But he can do whatever the hell he wants to his yard. If he wants to waste his time like that, he can do it. But what the hell is he messing with my yard for? He was pushing his little green spreader thing back and forth on my lawn. You know he washes that spreader like his car, even dries it with a shammy. I'm surprised he doesn't Armor-All the wheels too.

So he was pushing this spreader and, seeing me pull up, he waved. He waves to me. I said, "What are you doing there?" and he said, "Just killing some weeds," and I said, "I got professionals taking care of that." I had to get that company to do the lawn, you know. Jackie kept nagging me about keeping up with the neighbors. We move into a nicer area and all of a sudden she gets all uppity. I guess seeing who gets those post-aeration goose turds all over their shoes first is important to her. So I told him that I've got professionals doing what he's doing, and he said, "Well they're not doing a good job, are they?" and pointed to something in my lawn. It looked like grass to me, but he said it was a weed. Can you believe that? I almost clocked the old

guy in the jaw. I would've knocked his straw hat into the next yard.

So we got into it. I said, "Why don't you just worry about your own lawn?" and he said, "Because my lawn's fine, and I don't want your lawn messing up my lawn" and I said, "My lawn's not going to mess up your lawn because I pay good money for that company to keep things green" and he said, "I can spray paint the grass green but it doesn't mean it's healthy." Well I said, "How's my grass not healthy" and he said, "Just look at that weed right there" -- that's the one I said looked like grass anyway. So he said, "That there is what you would call crabgrass" and then he goes into this whole speech about what crabgrass is and where it came from and how it can spread. He even started spouting off some Latin names and stuff. Digit-something-or-another. He sounded like that Amish-looking guy with that gardening show on PBS. What's the name of that show? You know, that reminds me. What ever happened to that artist guy with the big hair and mustache that used to paint nature scenes all the time? All he ever painted were mountains and pine trees. His show was right before that gardening show. You know who I'm talking about? Jackie watched him all the time.

So Jim kept jabbering about crabgrass when I cut him off and said, "You know, you need to mind your own business," and I gave him that look. You know, this look. You can do it too, but you got to remember to press your lips together real tight like this...otherwise, it loses its effect. And now that I've started working out again it's even better. Jackie always stopped me from working out because she had me doing things around the house all the time. All that tired me out pretty quick, and who wants to lift weights after mowing the lawn and stuff? So, like I said, now that look's going to be even harder since I'm working out again.

Anyway, that look shut Jim up pretty quick. I knew he'd keep going on and on like the time he lectured me about staking this tree we had in the front yard. You see Jackie

wanted a cherry tree -- she'd always wanted a cherry tree -- and since I had just gotten the truck, I knew I couldn't say no again because I didn't have the excuse anymore that it wouldn't fit in the car. So Jackie and I went and got this tree. I just kept thinking about the mess the cherries were going to make all over the side walk. Them and the goose turds all over my shoes.

So she spent two hours picking out the right one -- she always knew how to waste my time -- and when she finally found the one she liked, the guy at the greenhouse told us we needed to stake it so it wouldn't fall over. Winter was coming and the thing would probably lay right down with the first big gust of wind. Well if I'm paying all this money for a tree, I'm not going to have it croak over the winter. So I decided to stake it that afternoon. Remember that was the day you wanted me to watch the Dallas-Green Bay game at your house. Let me tell you, I should've come over.

So I'm thinking I need to get some kind of stick to prop this tree up with. Of course Jackie went out leaving me with all the work, and I couldn't find a stick. I knew she'd get all huffy if the tree wasn't staked by the time she got home from having her hair done--or whatever she does on Sundays -- so I hopped in the truck and went and bought two brooms with long handles thinking I'd just saw the handles off and use them as stakes. Well Jim saw me sawing in the garage -- why he was in my driveway again, I don't know--and he started on me about wasting money on brooms when I could've just asked him for stakes since he's got stakes he uses to prop up his tomato plants and about how he'd be more than willing to help me out if I'd ask blah, blah, blah. The man never stops talking.

Well he was doing this same thing about the crabgrass but my look shut him up. Only Jackie saw me do this. She always hated that look. She ended up not going to yoga that night because, well, you already know she was packing up all her stuff and moving out of the house. I guess

she'd gone to the front door when she heard me pull up and then watched Jim and I get into it. She kept quiet so I didn't notice her until I gave Jim that look and she came out screaming. Boy, was she mad. Her voice got that real high-pitched squeal to it, and her neck was all blotchy. She's so pale, you know, that when her blood pressure goes up, you can tell. Anyway she must've scared Jim too because he sort of jerked his spreader thing and ran my foot over with it.

Jackie didn't notice because she was busy ranting. "All you think about is yourself" and "You never consider anyone else's feelings" and "You don't know how to do anything" and "You don't appreciate anybody." She was really laying into me. I was just trying to steer clear of her hands. You know how she's always talking with her hands? Something like this? Well, when she's mad her nails can be deadly, so I was trying to get out of their way. She'd gotten me pretty good a couple of times. The one time she even had some kind of paper in her hand -- the shopping list, I think. Yeah, it was the shopping list because she was griping about how I wouldn't go grocery shopping with her. She said, "Jason always goes with Liz," and I said, "That's because Jay can't do it on his own," and she said, "Yes he can," and I said, "No he can't," and she started waving that list in my face--I couldn't see the TV that way. Anyway, you've heard how I'm afraid of getting a paper cut on my eyeball, right? Well she started waving that list in front of me and I started freaking out thinking she's going to blind me or something so I grabbed for the paper and she ended up slashing my hand with her nail. I've always told her an attacker could never survive with her clawing away at him like that. Anyway, I made sure she put hydrogen peroxide on the shopping list.

So she's waving her hands in front of my face for the whole neighborhood to see, and she's going on and on about how I don't pay attention to her and how I only cause more trouble than good and how I should have stayed with

Melanie. Yeah, Melanie. Can you believe that? She mentioned Melanie after all this time. Four years. Four years ago was the last time I saw that girl. After the fling I promised Jackie I'd never see Melanie again, and I kept that promise. You know I felt real bad when it happened and I told Jackie everything. I couldn't help it. I had to tell her. And, well, she was OK with it, you know, because we weren't married yet, but I promised her anyway that I'd never see Melanie again. Never. And I haven't. But Jackie's got to bring her up again. She's got to rub salt into the wounds, doesn't she? She always knows how to make me feel bad.

So Jackie started crying right there on the front lawn. She covered her face and just started bawling. I could tell she was really upset because she even had that gasping for air thing going. Well I decided to give her a hug. I'm thinking maybe she's had a bad day or something. Maybe she's got to work third shift at the hospital again -- you know, she hates working third shift--so I'll make her feel better. But, no. Jim's got to screw everything up. I'd totally forgotten that he was even there. I mean, I figured with Jackie's squealing he would've left thinking his hearing aid would bust or something. Or maybe he'd go wash his spreader, I don't know. All I know is all of a sudden I heard him say something like "Do you need my hanky?" and he got to her before I did. Can you believe that? The neighbor's comforting my wife, and I'm just standing there. Then I heard Jackie say, "See, Jim's only trying to help" and something like "You don't appreciate anybody." That's what I don't get. She was always defending Jim. The guy can't even match his socks with his shirt and my wife's on his side. I mean, should I start wearing yellow socks and pink polos? Will that make me a better husband? Will that prove I love her?

I don't know. Jackie's living with Jay and Liz for now. Yeah, we've been talking, and I guess that's good. But I haven't seen Jim lately. Ever since Jackie left he's stayed in his own yard and, well, I haven't exactly gone out of my way

to do any work outside, so I don't see him. I'm glad he's out of my way.

You want me to order us a couple more beers? You're running kind of low on that one. I know you have to get home to Sue pretty soon, but we can still talk for a bit more. I don't have to be anywhere.

Thomas J. Kahl

coy and vance should die a slow, painful death

coy and vance should die.

Once they replaced Bo and Luke

Hazzard County wept.

William Pembroke

Beckett Strikes Back

"I am your father," he said.

"You are not my father," he said.

"I am your father," he said.

He did not move.

his shape seems to cut the light with a knife as large
as the one he holds to your face
he is large and defined with hair longer than your own
you think of your own hair
you think of washing it this morning
you think of how much you want to wash yourself now
right now
right there
you want to lick yourself clean
you can hear the fountain of the pond
you think of when it was built
you can remember the day exactly
pain
he thrusts again and again
your mind goes blank as the jolt shoots up your spine
into your cranium causing a numbness which you
have never experienced before
“maybe once” you think “when I was seven and I fell
off my bike, my mother was there to clean my
wounds”
your mother is dead now
you lay on the ground which consumes her being
being pushed deeper and deeper towards her
one last jolt and then laughter
thick, hefty laughter
you try to recall when you have heard such evil joy
“the movie last sunday” you think
“the man in the back row”
his face a blank dark screen with light pouring in from
all sides of it almost devouring it so there is no figure
at all
God’s wrath on Satan?
you close your eyes as he pulls on your blouse and

Heather Elworthy

you think of
your mother pulling on the clean white oxford which
she ironed every morning for school
you feel your shoes placed back on your feet
you think of your mother and your dependence on her
shoe-tying skills
you open your eyes and Satan is gone
light shines down upon you as you lay
the light cleanses you
"I have done nothing wrong
my mother told me so"

"Smitty, what're we doin tonight?"

"Mike an' me are gettin a coupl'a cases when he gets outta class. Pee-Wee's havin' a five-kegger. Thought we'd head over if we can't find somethin' better."

"I'm in. Spot me for another case an' I'll pay you on Monday."

"I thought you'd be with your woman. She drop ya?"

"Shut up. She went home for her Mom's birthday or something."

"Hey Geenie! What took you so long? We were about to leave without you. Did you make any money?"

"Yeah, about twenty bucks. That's only five an hour, but the kids were good. There were only two of them. I'm going back next Friday too. I don't have my fake. Is Mel coming?"

"No, but she gave me her ID, they never look at the picture."

Where, where, where, where? What the hell, why can't I ever find anything at this stupid store? Ugh!

"Tommy, toss me another."

"We're gettin low, Smitty. Let's go downtown."

"I thought we were going to Pee-Wee's?"

"Yeah, I heard Dana an' the girls were goin'? Let's get more first."

"No prob."

"Mel, why don't you wear that red shirt? Bobby sure liked it last weekend."

"I think I'm gonna wear Geenie's black one. Is it clean?"

"It's in my closet. If you're wearing that, can I wear the red one? It looked awesome on you last weekend."

"Yeah, but you have to be careful because the one

button is about to fall off. Maybe pin it or something. What're you wearing, Lisa?"

"This."

"Shut up. Why don't you wear those black jeans with my silky purple shirt?"

"Let me try it on. Geenie, grab me another beer, would ya?"

Ok, ok, calm down. Um...snack foods...pop... beer... magazines...frozen stuff...soaps... Oh, maybe with the soaps.

"Miss America, let's go. I swear, you spend more time on your hair than a girl."

"Fuck you, too. I'm coming."

"Hey, Tommy, where's your wife? I didn't think she let you out of the house after eight anymore."

"Dumbass, she went home. An' I do whatever the hell I want."

"Yeah, who you gonna do tonight?"

"Shut up, come on Mike, let's go."

"Hear that Garner? Tommy-boy's playing faithful while his wife's away. Ain't he the sweetest fucker you ever knew?"

Ok, shampoo...deodorant...razors...medicines...what the hell? Where are they? If I even have to go someplace else...Damn it!

"Come on, Lisa, just finish it already! I could've finished two while we waited we waited for you to drink that. I want to get to Pee-Wee's before the last keg is tapped."

"How many did he get?"

"I don't know, I heard six, but I don't want to get there and leave right away. Lisa, you ready?"

"Yeah, I want to stop by Geenie's room for a sec

though, I don't have any condoms left."

"I don't have any, little slut. I gave you the last one two weeks ago."

"You guys suck. Lisa, can't you go without for one night?"

"I just want to be safe. You wouldn't do it without one."

"I meant go without sex, slut. Let me look around, I might have one."

"Come on, let's go."

"Hey Pee-Wee, my man! This place is packed! Any chicks tonight or all losers like your last one?"

"They weren't losers; you just couldn't get any because you stink so bad. Ever notice how there are less losers around when you shower?"

"Fuck off. Where's the beer?"

"It's all downstairs except for one keg in there. Garner, if you're hooking up tonight, stay outta my room this time. I'm gonna need it. Use Bob's, he never gets any."

"That's cuz he likes guys, he just hasn't told you yet. He's trying to get up the nerve to ask you out."

"Get outta my house, dumbass."

"Garner, I thought you said Dana'd be here."

"I don't know. She told me she was this morning in History. Maybe they went to the Delta party."

"Those guys are assholes. I need another one, you ready?"

Kmart? Yeah, they have everything. Shit, there's Mandy. I hope she didn't see me! Oh, whatever, everyone goes to Kmart. How would she know just from seeing me at Kmart? Maybe she's here for the same fucking thing.

"Lisa, want another one? What is that, still your first?"

"I'm scoping, alright? See those guys coming down the stairs? The one in the blue is hot. I think he was in my

French class Freshman year."

"Yeah, I know him, his name's Matt or Mark or something."

"What year is he?"

"I think a senior. Who's that other guy with him?"

"Um, that's Pee-Wee. This is his place. Tommy's the one behind them. He has a girlfriend, I think. Hey, look, Brandy and Sarah are here! Let's go see what's going on."

"Alright, Garner, the cue ball's gotta hit the end rail and then come back here, an' whoever gets it closest to this end of the table without touching the side rails breaks."

"Where did you come up with this? Let's just drink."

"Watch Tommy shoot, he sucks."

"I get better after a couple a' beers. Give me a little time to get warmed up."

"Pee-Wee, who's that girl in the pink?"

"That's Sarah, she lived down the hall from me my freshman year. She's cool, but I think she's got a boyfriend now. Her roommate Brandy is easy as fuck. Buy her a beer and she'll go home with ya."

"Well then, what the hell's she doin' over there? Bring'r on over."

Ok, they've gotta be by the soaps and stuff. Shit. Um...maybe down here. They could make this a little easier on me.

"Can I help you find something?"

"What? Oh, no, I'm uh, you know, just looking. Thanks anyway."

Shit! Please, God, give me a little help here, I just need to find out.

"Hey, Pee-Wee! Great party!"

"Hi, Mel. Glad you could make it. Brandy, Sarah,

what's up?"

"Nothin' Pee-Wee."

"I hope you ladies are all having a good time."

"Well, we were wondering who that guy was that you were just talking to, the tall one, with the blond hair."

"That's Garner. Come on, I'll introduce you."

"Hey, Pee-Wee, what're you doing with all these beautiful ladies? Share in the wealth, man."

"Mike, Garner, Tommy, these are my girls, Sarah, Brandy, Mel, and...I don't think I've been introduced to you two yet."

"I'm Lisa and this is Geenie. Nice to meet you all."

"Pee-Wee, you got anything better for us to drink?"

"Yeah, I've got a little Vodka upstairs if you wanna do shots. Why don't we all go upstairs to my living room?"

Shit, there're a hundred different kinds. Ok, just pick one, dummy. How so I know which one works best? Fuck, I don't want to get a screwed up answer. Damn it! Well, if it costs more, it must work better. Um, seven bucks, fifteen, twelve, seven-fifty, -that one must be cheap - thirteen...that sounds good, thirteen. Sort of middle-of-the-road, but on the higher side. Ok, please God, please God, please.

"Wait, I have an idea, Pee-Wee, do you have any lemons? We could do lemon drops."

"Just a sec, I'll go see..."

"So, Garner, what're you studying?"

"Um, Business, Accounting. I'm interning with CAO downtown."

"Wow, and you're graduating this year?"

"I hope so."

"What about you, Tommy? What are you going to be when you grow up?"

"I'm a History major. I applied to a coupla grad

schools, but I might try teaching high school."

"Hey, Geenie's gonna teach too. She's in French though. Ask her anything and she can tell you how to say it in French. Last year she taught me how to swear in French so I wouldn't get yelled at for swearing at home, too bad I found out my Dad took four years of French in high school. I guess I'm gonna have to learn a new language."

Alright, now relax, I'm sure you're fine, just stop shaking and read the directions. Come on, you have to do this right. You didn't buy it just to mess up and worry again. Please, God, please. Just do me this one favor, and if it's negative, I'll never do anything bad ever again. I promise.

"Who's first? Garner, have you ever done lemon drops before? Come here, I'll show you how."

"Lisa, don't scare the poor guy. Pee-Wee, give me the sugar."

"You girls do this a lot?"

"Shut up, it's fun. Just watch."

"Ok, Garner, I'm putting the sugar on this lemon, and Lisa'll hold it between her teeth. You just drink the shot, then take the lemon from her mouth. No biggie."

"See Garner, I won't bite, I promise."

"Go Garner, go Garner."

"Yeah, you stud!"

"Who's next?"

"Brandy, wanna try it?"

"Alright. Mel, give Mike a shot."

"Wait a minute, it's Pee-Wee's turn. Come here, big guy."

"What about you Tommy? Are you in?"

"Yeah, you too Sarah, try one with Tommy."

"I don't think so, I'm driving. I'll stick with the beer tonight."

"Geenie, I guess you're up. Here, Tommy, have a lemon wedge."

Um, I need to put two drops in here, and um... one of these. What the hell is this, a chemistry experiment? Miss Geenie, will you pass the test? You'd think they'd make this so the common man could use it - or the common woman anyway. What the hell was I thinking?

"Geenie, are you alright? How many shots have you had?"

"I'm fine... I haven't had too much."

"Why don't we go upstairs for a little while."

"Um... yeah, ok."

"Lisa, come here. Come here for a minute."

"You okay? You want... what? Oh yeah, just a minute, it's in my coat. Don't be gone too long, okay?"

"Mhmm."

Ok, now how do I know if it's ready? Maybe I should stir it or something. Ten minutes. These should take like three seconds. Is your life about to fall apart? Wait just ten minutes, and we'll let you know. Geez, I should've read the boxes and bought whichever one was quickest. Probably that seventeen dollar one took thirty seconds. Come on! You're such a dummy! How do you get yourself into these messes?

"Wow, it's almost two o'clock."

"Yeah, do you see my shirt?"

"No, shut up for a sec..."

"What're you looking for?"

"I don't know. Shit! Just shut up. Get off the bed for a minute."

"Ok..."

"Damnit!"

"What?!"

"Nothing, did you find your shirt?"

"Yeah, what're you looking for?"

"Um... I uh... um, I can't find the condom I had on. It must have come off. Thought it was in the sheets or something."

"Well when did you lose it?"

"I don't know, in the middle."

"And you didn't stop to tell me?"

"Well I thought it just fell onto the bed. Anyway it was too late to stop."

"Well did you look everywhere?"

"I can't find it, maybe it's still...um, you know."

"Lisa, Mel, come on, we're leaving."

"Geenie, is everything alright?"

"I said we're leaving. Now. Let's go."

"Tommy, where you been, man?"

"Nowhere, come on, I need another beer."

"Oh, man, were you with Brandy? I thought she left!"

"No, it wasn't Brandy, it was that Gina girl. Is there any beer left or what?"

"Geenie, knock, knock, are you in here? Oh, hey Geenie."

"Mel, hi, um, yeah, what is it?"

"Geenie! Oh my God, is that a test? What the hell's going on?"

"Oh, it's nothing. It was negative."

"Geenie! Why didn't you tell me? How late are you?"

"Um, I don't know. Like three weeks. Anyway, it's no big deal, I said it's negative. I guess I just skipped a month."

"Wow. You could've told me or something. Who's the guy?"

"No one. It's nothing. Now let's stop talking about it already."

"Yeah, ok... sorry. Wanna come down to my room? We just ordered a pizza."

We stood outside her house
on the grass beneath the great oak
where we built our tree house in second grade.
One little board was still nailed up there,
with a rusty nail that wouldn't let go.
Moonlight trickled down through the branches,
like milk trickles
when it's poured over a bowl of corn flakes,
or when a baby spits a little of it down his chin,
and the white drop hovers for a minute, then falls.

The moonlight splashed on her face,
creeping around the shadows,
spotlighting her left cheekbone
and half of a smile, no lipstick, just lips.
She stood there in her summer dress,
the one with the yellow flowers
that her grandmother thinks is too short
for a lady to wear
because it doesn't go below the knee.
The two straps, grabbing her shoulders,
holding them in place,
like that awful man did when she was sixteen.

The scars on her back, zipped up by the dress,
on the front, covered by a smile, no lipstick.

Sometimes I looked at the zipper and thought of
unzipping,
but then I thought of him unzipping it, ripping it,
and her screaming. Is she still considered a virgin?
Many times I've wanted a kiss,
but I keep thinking of her smudged lipstick

on that night she came to me
crying, shaking, holding her ripped dress on like a
shawl.

She came to me, of all people,
hysterical, eye shadow running down her face.
Collapsing into my arms, she could not speak,
as if the red smeared around her mouth was blocking
her voice.

Once I lost my mother's
wedding band. Once my purse
was stolen. Sometimes it's enough just
to kneel behind that funny screen
and murmur to that shadow of a man,
and maybe it doesn't make
a difference but how else do we minus them,
all those dumb regrets. One night
you go to the pub and he salutes
you with his gin and tonic.
One night you go and there's an empty stool
but it's more than that,
it's the negation, the not there of him,
the empty glass that no one can fill. Sometimes
you think that you can stay the darkness,
think that you can budget, balance
your bankbook. Sometimes, we'd stand on the iron
railings and watch the sun dip in reds behind
the gas station. Once in Chicago,
B. B. King's daughter did it. Emptied
me with music, something liquid, malleable.
Once, I dropped a contact lens in
the sink. Once I dropped myself.
One night, I thought the crescent moon
could be a toe nail paring
of God. Once, I dreamed my lover's
hand was wrapped like a cold
fish in deli paper. When I untaped
it, I cut my fingers on crushed
glass that looked like ice. Once, I thought
you, my dear, with your emphatic
gestures and Looney Tunes ties
were someone else. Are you a snake

with a new skin? A scrap of paper in the basket?
It can be like a dip in a roller coaster, a missing
limb, a bridge with a gap, a sink full of hair
we tried too hard to bleach. We wonder at
the nothings,
the words never said, all the absent ineffables
that haunt us with their lack.

Misty Pomorski

Escape from Sodom

looking at Lot's Frau by Anselm Keifer

The train tracks descend into the nothingness
left by the brimstone and fire
that fell from the heavens.

It is Genesis in reverse,
as the waves of heat
melt and separate the earth.

Unheeded warnings proclaimed
the destiny of mankind,
from which not even I can escape.

There were no good men to save me,
to obtain the mercy of God
lost in this city of corruption.

Desolate winds blow grains of salt
through my fingertips as I
grasp at the lingering remains.

Smoke rises from the barren canvas
as I seek refuge in Segor.
The temptation calls to me.

I am afraid to turn and look.

I had never been to McCann's on a Thursday before. It was crowded. McCann's had always attracted an older crowd. The drinks were a little more expensive, but worth it just because of the lack of college students inside. A majority of the others in the bar were still in their work attire. Dozens of nearly middle-aged men sipping on White Russians and smoking imported cigarettes. I hope that I never think that those damn gold-plated cigarette cases are cool. Some of the men even have their initials engraved on the outside. For some reason I can't help but think that that is going to come back and haunt one of those guys some day. I know that I'm going to read about one of them getting the shit kicked out of them because some angry husband found his cigarette case on the nightstand. It's fun to watch the unwinding process, though. With each drink the tie gets looser, the voice gets louder, and the hair gets messier. And my parents wondered why I had to come out to Boston to study psychology. If this sample population is a representation of the Boston area, I made the right decision.

I was creating the world's smallest cyclone in my Long Island iced tea when I glaced over at the door just in time to watch it open. Without hesitation Janine started toward me. The same strut, the same smirk, and the same big brown eyes, but one change. Her hair was about two inches in length. The gel glistened every time she passed under one of the hanging lamps. More than anything I wanted to stand up and grab her as tight as I could and whirl her around, but my legs were frozen. She sat down across from me.

"Skate or die, right," she said without any movement of her eyes. They looked hard and deep into my own.

"Jaybird. You bitch." I inspected her hair as she took her eyes off me to flip her head around to whip the excess water out. "You look good. You look really good. I wasn't sure if you were going to show up." Her eyes were fixed on mine

again. "But I'm glad that you came out here."

"You say that like you thought you might never see me again." She took my hands in hers.

"Did you want something to drink?" I pulled my hands away and started fidgeting with the wine list.

"Yeah, but not here, Brian." She hadn't called me Brian since the exhibit almost four years before.

I met Jaybird at a student exhibit at Syracuse during my second year of undergrad. I had submitted some photographs of mine which I had worked on over the summer. Though my pictures were displayed in an ill-lit corner of the room, one of my shots did make the flyer which was dispersed around campus.

Jaybird was one of the featured painters. All of the other featured artists floated around the building like they owned the place. Rumor has it that one guy even came in a limo, but I never saw it.

Jaybird sat in one of the chairs next to the refreshments pretty much the whole night. She was the only person in the building who mingled less than I did. Her long brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail, but some strands managed to work loose and hung down in her face. She paid no attention to the dangling misfits, and even less to the people drooling over her work.

"Hey, excuse me." I was going to compliment her work, but she beat me to it.

"They're great," she said.

"Excuse me?"

"Your photos, they're great." She pointed over to the corner. "It's a shame that they stuck them in the blackhole. That corner just sucks in darkness like an abyss."

"I was just happy they even put 'em up." I suddenly remembered my purpose. "I just wanted to ask you ..."

"Sure I'd love to go outside and have a cigarette." Jaybird sprung from her chair and headed outside. It's not

Keeping My Eye on Jaybird

what I was going to ask, but it was a better answer than any question I could have asked. Her cigarette was lit and we still had about twenty yards to the door. She stopped and turned to me. "By the way, I'm Janine Lewis. You're Brian, right?"

"Yeah, but everyone calls me Dickie." I immediately regretted telling her that as she tried to raise her left eyebrow. "Because my middle name is Richard." I think she was concerned about her lack of muscle control in her face. "What's your middle name?"

"I don't have one." She was even too cool for a middle name. Which is why Johnny and I nicknamed her Jaybird. Everyone needs three names; it's mandatory for me. "Dickie, huh." After filling the foyer with smoke she finally made it out the doors. "Cute."

From the first day that Jaybird visited our house it was a given that she was going to be Johnny's girl. I should have known. She had long hair.

"Janine, meet my roommate, Johnathan Andrew Carnegie. He's going to be a millionaire some day." I forced out a chuckle and then walked into the kitchen to grab a beer.

"Hello, Janine." Johnny smirked. He knew.

"Hello, Johnny." Janine smiled back. She knew.

"Does anyone want a beer?" Johnny was on the wagon and Janine hated beer. I knew.

That night, I stayed up until four o'clock drinking cheap beer and rolling joints, and I watched Johnny and Janine say just the right things to each other.

"What do you mean you don't have a middle name?" Johnny was so passionate about this question that he didn't even pick up the cigarette that had fallen out of his mouth. Instead he let it burn a tiny hole in the rug, as if to physically punctuate his question.

"My parents didn't give me a middle name, why is that

so hard for you two to understand?" Janine picked up the cherry that had fallen off the end of Johnny's cigarette and set it in the ashtray without a flinch. "Why is it such a big deal?"

From that day on Jaybird completed the trinity.

Johnny decided that he wanted to go to a show for his last night in Syracuse. Johnny, Jaybird, and I headed over to a club which was right off campus to see some sixties flashback band. I told him that I didn't think that that was a great idea considering the fact that the reason he had to leave so abruptly was because he owed half of the campus money. Johnny's recreational drug use had turned into a capitalistic opportunity for him. Arizona would be his new home.

"Look at Johnny." Jaybird motioned over to the dance floor. Johnny was sweating from strumming his air guitar. "Ya know, I love Johnny and all, but the kid has no style." Jaybird laughed and then turned to me.

"You're gonna miss him aren't you?" I asked.

"Of course I'm gonna miss him. Aren't you?" She knew that she didn't have to ask me that question.

"Well, yeah. But I mean, you're like boyfriend and girlfriend, or something. Aren't you supposed to be crying and stuff?" My intentional awkwardness made Jaybird laugh. If nothing else, I could always make Jaybird laugh.

"Oh, shut up." She turned to watch Johnny some more. "I really doubt that we would move much further to tell you the truth." She turned to me again. "In a way this actually makes things easier. I'm gonna be graduating this spring, and it would be harder for me to leave him than it is for him to leave me." I knew that she was telling me the truth, she always did. "Anyway, are you ready to go?"

"What? And leave 'Club Granola!'"

"Yeah, no shit. I'll grab Johnny." Jaybird strutted onto the dance floor. Johnny grabbed her around her waist. He swung her around like every princess should be swung. And

Keeping My Eye on Jaybird

when they realized that the world wasn't spinning with them, they stopped and held each other tight.

On the way out the door, Johnny grabbed me and pulled me aside.

"Dickie." A spittle landed on my upper lip, but I let it go. "Keep an eye on Jaybird for me while I'm gone, will ya?"

"Of course." I wiped my upper lip. "You know I will."

"Dickie!" Jaybird jumped on my back right in the middle of the ska/reggae section.

"Holy shit." I really couldn't think of much else to say. One second I'm contemplating whether to buy a Madness or a Skatalites CD and the next thing I know the biggest crush of the first twenty-one years of my life is riding on my back.

"How have you been?" she asked. "I haven't talked to you in so long." Jaybird's eyes opened wider than I had ever seen them before.

"I've been all right. How about you?" That one was easier to get out.

"Decent. Pretty decent." She started to catch her breath. She started to catch her breath. Apparently she had sprinted across the store. "How's school? Can you tell me what's wrong with me yet?"

"Umm, no. Sorry." I smirked.

"Funny." She seemed to have finally slowed her physiology down. "Do you want some coffee?" Jaybird cocked her hips as her head tilted in the direction of the coffee bar across the street.

Jaybird grabbed my hand and guided me through traffic and several large puddles before reaching the curb. We made it inside, a little wet, but we made it in and sat down.

"I'm sorry that I haven't kept in touch as much as I should, but I've had a lot of things going on lately, with work and everything." Leave it to Jaybird not to show a pinch of nervousness. Then again, what does *she* have to be nervous

about? "God, I'm so happy that I ran into you. I miss you a lot."

"I miss you, too." Of course that had to be obvious. "Have you talked to Johnny lately?"

"Actually, we take turns calling each other about once every month. He's still fucked up. He says that he isn't, that he quit everything, even smoking, but I can tell that he's lying. He was never any good at lying to me."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I was hoping he could straighten out in Arizona." Neither of us had touched our coffee yet.

"I'd really rather not talk about him. I'd rather talk about you." She sipped her coffee. "So what are you up to?"

"Well, I'm leaving for Boston on Tuesday." I looked into her eyes for any sort of flinch, any recognition of shock. Jaybird blinked.

"Really, that soon?" Jaybird looked aside. "Do you have a job out there and everything?"

"Yeah, I'm going to be conseling adolescents with chemical dependencies." I hoped she didn't think that I was a hypocrite.

"Wow, that's great. You should be really good at that." Jaybird smirked as she hung her face over her coffee cup, letting the steam massage her skin.

"So what have you been up to besides painting? Seeing anybody?" It had to be asked.

"Actually, no." Jaybird laughed. "I find that men interfere with the creative process too much."

We both chuckled.

"Are you going to come visit me in Boston sometime?"

"Of course" She wiped a drop from her lip. "You know I will."

The walk to my apartment was cold, wet, and longer than usual. March in Boston has this "Yin-Yang" quality to it. Beautiful and sunny at times, dismal and rainy at others. But

Keeping My Eye on Jaybird

both are needed to keep balance. Janine held on to my arm with both hands all the way to my apartment building. I showed her the deli where I ate lunch everyday, and the tobacco shop that I would buy my cigarettes at if I still smoked. I would still go in and browse around every once in a while. Janine responded to all of my comments like they were the most interesting tid-bits of information she had ever heard.

"Well, here we are." I fumbled through my pockets in search of my keys. "Hold on a second."

Jaybird placed her hands on my shoulders to calm me down. Then she reached into my jacket and grabbed my keys out from the inside pocket.

"Looking for these?" She smirked and opened the door herself.

"Stairs or elevator?" I asked.

"Oooo. Elevator of course." She pressed the sixth floor button. She actually remembered my floor number from our conversation on the phone the week before.

Janine headed toward my apartment like she had been there a thousand times before. She stuck the key in the lock, opened the door, and took her first step in all in one continuous motion.

"Wow, Brian. This place is pretty nice." She tossed my keys on the counter. "No Fugazi poster?"

"No. I sort of toned down a bit." It was up for a while, but it didn't look right. I headed to the kitchen. "Did you want that drink now?"

"Yeah, sure," she shouted from the living room.

"Ya know, I was supposed to be keeping an eye on you," I told her.

"Well, it's been a very watchful eye," Janine chuckled.

"Yeah, well." I had already been staring into her dark, round brown eyes when she rolled over to face me. "I think I

might have seen too much."

"Listen, Brian." Those two cords in her neck popped out as she raised onto her elbows. I had never noticed them before that morning. "Will you stop worrying about Johnny? That was three years ago. We've all gone on, and this is where we ended up." I was listening, but I still wasn't satisfied. "Brian, I came out here to Boston to spend this week with you to get to know you again. The one thing that I do regret is that I let you slip through my fingers after Johnny left. But I'm sure as hell not going to let it happen again. Anyway, you saw me first. Doesn't that give you dibs or something?"

"Funny." I flipped over on my side. "When does your plane come in?"

"2:50, I believe. I'll have to call." She sat all the way up and turned to me. She was still wearing my high school class t-shirt. She thought it was hilarious. "Brian?"

"What?"

"Do you know anything about that gallery down the street?" She looked at me and smiled. "You wouldn't mind if I stayed another couple days or a week or so, would you? You know, so I can check out that gallery and stuff."

"Oh, the gallery, huh? No, I don't see a problem with you staying here for a little while longer." I laughed as Janine straddled me and rested her forehead on mine. "Hey, you know what?" I raised my eyebrows up and down.

"What?" Janine tried to do the same, but she couldn't. She gave up and slumped down on top of me.

"Some pancakes would be great right now."

Janine slid off me and burrowed her way under the covers and rested her head on my chest. "I'm sure they would."

Jamie Flannick

the descending, bedazzling star

the descending, bedazzling star,
feather in flight,
landed in a center of all
mesmerizing the mass, a stinging bright.

They all embraced, a unity of hands,
and danced in its paralyzing light,
fulfilling all their passions
that through the heavens, might.

The mass closed in with naked hands,
groping through the star beams of delight...

But no one ever saw, nor ever guessed,
about the star's core of death.
A center of empty dreams
frozen to an evil intent,
placed upon a star that fell
from man's discontent.

"Hot Corned Beef" in dusty orange neon
vaguely illuminates the window
of Chuck's All Night Diner.
I've been sitting at the grungy red counter
for about five minutes, waiting for my pancakes.
It's election night, the black and white TV buzzes.
Brown eyes, green eyes.
Some with glasses, some squinting,
straining to hear the small monitor in the corner.
I look down into my lumpy white milkshake.

The door opens, but the bell doesn't clang,
it's been broken for a few months now.
No one notices.
Into the red swivel stool next to me
slides a man, black,
about forty, Cedrick Napoleon.
Bass in his voice
like that of his upright
mountain of sculpted spruce
to which he makes love every Saturday night
at the Down Under club.

Eggs scrambled with cheese for Cedrick tonight.

The calloused right hand of a jazz musician,
padded like the paw of a panther
meets my slender grip
and I don't want to let go,
because at this moment
I hold in my hand
five fingers, similar looking to my own,
that are able to quell the pain of forty years

Eggs Scrambled with Cheese at 2 AM

of filth and cockroaches
with the simple pluck of a G chord.
I didn't want to let go.

Tonight the Democrats rejoice
with Bill Clinton.

So what.

Tonight I eat my pancakes
with Cedrick Napoleon.

Misty Pomorski

A Pig's Tail

inspired by Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude

In one hundred years
the family of Jose Arcadio Buendia
would pronounce that the world was round
by going beyond the limits of human knowledge.

The family of Jose Arcadio Buendia
would not baptize their children
for they had gone beyond the limits of
human knowledge
and delivered letters to the dead.

They would not baptize their children
in a world full of solitude
where letters delivered to the dead
confirmed that time was going in a circle.

In a world full of solitude
the birth of yet another Jose Arcadio Buendia
confirmed that time was going in a circle
turned again and again by miracles and magic.

The birth of yet another Jose Arcadio Buendia
almost completes the familial circle
turned again and again by miracles and magic
which condemned them to a life of solitude.

The almost complete familial circle
spawns a child with a pig's tail
condemned to a life of solitude
for one hundred years.

Mrs. Lasko took off her brown tortoiseshell glasses and wiped them with a tissue she had in her sweater pocket. The distraction allowed her a few moments of time to gather her thoughts and her patience. All period she had been trying to get through chapter six of *The Scarlet Letter* but the eighth-graders she taught at Our Lady of Saints school were out of control. The desks were no longer in any discernable pattern and the faded blue carpet was covered with shredded paper and a rainbow of sticky gum. Katrina Veda was painting her nails and Kevin Breman, who looked an awful lot like her ex-husband, was surfing on his desk and flinging rubber bands at the crucifix. The noise level in the room pounded in rhythm with her aching head. She could only imagine how it must sound from the hallway and the other classrooms. She looked at her faded copy of Hawthorne's classic and thought about her ex-husband. The modern day version -- Hester Prynne replaced by Michael Lasko. She put her glasses back on and tried again.

"Settle down, class. If we don't get through chapter six, you will have extra homework."

The threat seemed to amuse the kids rather than subdue them and they got even rowdier. A door opened down the hall and Mrs. Lasko heard Debbie Noyer's heavy footsteps come toward her classroom. Without knocking, Debbie, tall and imposing, opened Mrs. Lasko's door and entered the room, slamming it behind her. The kids looked up and got quiet so fast that Mrs. Lasko thought Debbie had some sort of mute button. The kids rose to their feet in the customary greeting.

"Good Morning, Miss Noyer," they sang in their all-of-a-sudden sweet voices.

The mere presence of Debbie would always quiet the kids down and then she would just pretend she needed to talk to Mrs. Lasko about something. But today Debbie broke the unspoken code between them. She took over Mrs. Lasko's

class.

"Sit down and shut your mouths. I have students who care about school trying to concentrate down the hall. I better not hear another sound out of this room." Debbie glared at the kids. Mrs. Lasko stood in the corner of the room, her face red. She stood slumped in defeat as Debbie got control of her class. She looked at the young faces, the adolescent bodies hidden behind the navy uniforms. The first day of school the kids were great. They stopped listening to her the second week. Now Debbie had turned on her as well. Michael let her down too. She looked at the green good luck bear that he had given her when she first started teaching three years ago. It hadn't been bringing her luck for a while. She hovered in the corner,; no one seemed to see her there. She was sure she saw Kevin Breman smirk at her -- that damn condescending smile that mirrored Michael's. She longed for a cigarette and a glass of bourbon, straight up. She longed for a closet to hide in.

Debbie shot one final glare toward the kids and left. Mrs. Lasko moved from the shadows to take her place as teacher. As soon as Miss Noyer's footsteps could no longer be heard, her class began to get rowdy again. Mrs. Lasko did something then that she had always promised herself she wouldn't do. She sat down at her desk and began to cry. Her class looked at her with wide eyes and open mouths. The only sound in the room was Mrs. Lasko's quick, sobbing breaths. After several moments, Kevin Breman, his big blue eyes concerned, spoke up.

"Mrs. Lasko, why are you crying?"

She looked at him through her tears. All she could see was her ex-husband. He had been as clueless as Kevin was. She took the copy of *The Scarlet Letter* that she was gripping in her sweaty palm and threw it at Kevin before running out of the room.

Mrs. Lasko could hear her class from the lavatory where she stood wiping the smeared mascara from her face.

She stood in the child-size lavatory and looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her brown eyes were puffy and her red hair was sticking out all over. She looked like a nutty professor. She had turned into the mental-breakdown professor. She searched for the cigarette she had in her sweater pocket. Debbie came down the hall again to quiet her class down. Mrs. Lasko threw some cold water on her face and took a deep breath before walking out into the hall. Debbie saw her and pulled her back into the lavatory.

"Susan, what the hell are you doing? Crying in front of your students...throwing a book at Kevin...get control of yourself. You are already under scrutiny from the administration...now what are you doing?"

Mrs. Lasko lit up the cigarette and inhaled deeply. A chubby fourth-grade girl walked past the lavatory and stared.

"You can't smoke in here. What's your problem?"

Mrs. Lasko turned on Debbie. "Get off my back. You betrayed me earlier. Who are you to come walking into my class and take over like that? You had no right..."

Debbie grabbed the cigarette from between Mrs. Lasko's lips and ground it out with her heavy foot.

"I had no right? I am a teacher first and foremost. I don't care what I have to do to make sure my students get to learn. It seems you don't hold the same philosophy."

Debbie started to walk away, then turned back toward Mrs. Lasko. "You need to learn to get control of your class...your whole damn life." She stomped away.

Mrs. Lasko stood staring at the hallway for a minute. She bent over, picked up the cigarette butt and threw into the nearest toilet. Debbie was right. She had lost control. It had happened at her last school too. She had never been like this. Then she got married, divorced...Christ, it had gotten so bad that she couldn't even control kids in a Catholic school. Our Lady of Saints had given her a chance and she blew it. No good luck bear would get her out of this one. Well she didn't need any damn good luck bear. She certainly didn't

need Debbie's help. People were always trying to help and they just screwed her up.

She took one more deep breath and returned to her class.

Kevin Breman had gone to the nurse and she went down to see how he was doing. The rest of the period had gone by without more trouble. The students were not exactly willing to learn, but they were co-operative. They were probably still stunned by what happened earlier. Because of the events in the morning, she had a meeting with Principal Stearner to look forward to at the end of the day. She couldn't wait. Walking through the olive-green hallway on the way to the nurse's office she noticed the bulletin board that read "Our Lady of Saints Wishes You A Happy Thanksgiving" in orange construction paper letters. She had forgotten how close Thanksgiving was. It didn't matter, she had no plans. She usually went with Michael to his family's house but this year she would probably just eat pizza or something. She remembered she still needed to get something for the wedding. What does one get two attorneys? Michael had said something about Samantha wanting an antique mantle clock. She thought about buying a mantle clock from K-Mart. She'd save a lot of money. She couldn't believe that the wedding was this weekend. It was always in the distance. But now it loomed over her -- it was only three days away. She would probably just give them money. She had no desire to look for a mantle clock for Samantha.

On Nurse Nemeth's door, there was a poster about the four food groups. Mrs. Lasko knocked right above the dairy group and waited several seconds before the door opened. A tall, frizzy haired woman stared at her. The crisp whiteness of her nurse's uniform blinded Mrs. Lasko. Kevin was in the office on the cot with a cloth over his forehead. Nurse Nemeth shooed her away.

"He's upset enough as it is. He's got a nice bruise on his forehead and he doesn't need to see you. You know, his mother is a lawyer. I'd prepare myself for the worst." She slammed the door in Mrs. Lasko's face. Under her breath, Mrs. Lasko called Nurse Nemeth a bitch.

The lunch bell rang and Mrs. Lasko headed for her car instead of the lounge. News travels fast in a small private school and she needed some time alone to clear her head. She needed to call Michael.

The pay-phone outside of Burger King was covered with graffiti. Mrs. Lasko dialed the number quickly. A firm female voice answered.

"Good Afternoon, Smith, Lasko, and Gentry. May I help you?"

"Yes, Michael Lasko, please."

She was put on hold and soft music drifted from the phone. She lit a cigarette. A light drizzle dampened her coat as she waited.

"Lasko here."

She jumped at the sound of the familiar, demanding voice.

"Michael, it's Susan."

"Hey, how are you, Susan?"

"I've been better...Listen I need to talk to...or rather ask your advice." The sound of his voice made her tense in a curious way.

"What's up?"

She explained what had happened that morning.

"Oh Susan," Michael said, "How do you manage to get yourself into these situations?"

The tone of condescension in his voice reminded her of the argument they had right before the divorce. He had told her she was always setting herself up to fail. "You can't even organize your thoughts," he had said. "How are you going to organize and take control of a classroom?" The words

had stung like a slap in the face. She felt herself redden with humiliation at his tone.

"Susan, I don't know what to say. You could be in a lot of trouble. I...hold on, I've got another call."

She was put on hold again. She was used to that from Michael. She had to put her life on hold during their entire marriage. That was when her teaching started to lose something. The divorce was mutual; the marriage was already failing when she found the letter from Samantha in Michael's briefcase. It was not as freeing as she had imagined it would be. Somehow, she was still trapped in a life with Michael. The line clicked back on.

"Susan, I have someone very important on the phone right now. Can I get back to you?"

"I guess...I'm at a pay phone now...Do you want-"

"I have an idea. I'll transfer you over to Samantha, she'll be glad to help."

"Michael, no I-" The line clicked off again. The last person she wanted to talk to was Samantha. Her phone rang twice before she answered it.

"Samantha Reeves-Lasko."

Reeves-Lasko? Christ, they weren't even married yet. "Uh...Samantha, it's Susan Lasko." There was a moment of silence on the other end.

"Susan. Hi. What can I do for you?"

"Listen, Michael transferred me to you...I needed some advice. You sound busy, I'll just try Michael again later."

"No, Susan. I have some time. What do you need to know?" Samantha's voice became warm and friendly. Mrs. Lasko knew she was just playing along to please Michael. Hell, she had done that herself only a year ago. She explained her situation as quickly as she could. To her surprise, Samantha kept a professional attitude.

"Well, I would call the parents first to apologize and make a big deal about making it up to them and the student. If you can passify them, you may be able to avoid a law suit.

I can't say for sure however, especially if the mother is an attorney."

"Thanks, Samantha. I appreciate your time."

"Sure. See you at the wedding on Saturday?"

The dig caught her off-guard for a moment. She recovered and answered smoothly. "Of course, one o'clock at Our Lady of Saints."

"Great. See you then." The line went dead.

Back at school, Mrs. Lasko had two more classes to get through before the end of the day. She made both of them study-halls. She just couldn't deal with trying to teach. The students were very quiet and eyed her with a mixture of fear, pity, and amusement. She couldn't blame them. She threw a fit right in front of the students. She watched them work and was angry at herself for losing control. They were just kids. She shouldn't have let them get to her and she shouldn't have given up so easily. She promised herself she would try harder--but everyone just kept getting in her way. Michael and his stupid wedding, Debbie and her holier-than-thou attitude...she was still the same old Mrs. Lasko. Now the kids respected her even less and she had hit Kevin Breman with a book. The sad part was that she kind of liked Kevin. She kind of liked all of her students.

The bell rang to signal the end of the day. Mrs. Lasko headed for Principal Stearner's office. She was ready for whatever Stearner had to say. Debbie stopped her in the hall.

"Susan, I am sorry about earlier. I had no right to take over like that. I just got frustrated too." She took a deep breath and looked Mrs. Lasko in the eyes. "Can I help you work it out?"

Mrs. Lasko's smile was cold. "I don't want your kind of help." She continued to Principal Stearner's office.

When she arrived, the receptionist barely acknowl-

edged her and told her to have a seat. Kevin Breman was sitting in one of the chairs across from her. He had a small bruise on his forehead. He looked at her and then dropped his eyes to his hands folded in his lap. It was strange, both of them waiting outside the Principal's office. Both of them afraid to look at one another. Principal Stearner's door opened and she walked out, looking very intimidating in her dark suit and tight bun. She motioned for Mrs. Lasko to come in.

"Susan, have a seat." Her voice was firm but soft. "We need to talk."

Mrs. Lasko sat down on the brown leather chair.

"Your behavior today was unacceptable and inexcusable. A teacher must always try to stay in control. Your losing it in class today is a permanent mark on your record, and assaulting a student is deplorable. What happened today, Susan?"

Mrs. Lasko felt the tears push at her eyes. She wanted to explain her love of teaching, her marriage, her divorce, her loss of confidence, she wanted to explain her guilt away. But she knew that Stearner didn't want to hear excuses. She looked Principal Stearner in the eye.

"What happened today? I lost control. Pure and simple. I broke the first rule of teaching. There was no reason why I did what I did; why I threw a book at Kevin. There is no excuse."

Principal Stearner was silent for a moment. Then, she leaned toward Mrs. Lasko. "Susan, I like you. I've liked you from day one. I know what happened at your last school but I also found out good things about you. I was willing to give you a chance because you have a knack for teaching. Now, you need to get back confidence and control. I can't forgive what you've done but I can assure you we all have problems we need to work through." She sighed. "You need to talk to Kevin." She let Kevin into her office and left. He sat down next to her, his brown hair was tousled and his hands were still folded. Several moments passed before Mrs. Lasko

spoke.

"Kevin, how are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, Mrs. Lasko," he softly said. "How are you?"

She was taken aback. How was she? She wasn't sure. She hadn't thought about it for a long time.

"I'm doing alright Kevin." He sat staring at his hands. She took a deep breath. "Kevin, I wanted to apologize to you. What I did was inexcusable and wrong. A teacher should never lose control like I did. I am very sorry."

He bit his lip and looked up, right into her eyes. She waited for his response. She was ready to accept whatever he had to say. She was anxious to know what he was thinking.

He spoke in a soft voice. "Mrs. Lasko, I...I wanted to apologize to you for being so bad in your class."

Mrs. Lasko tilted her head in surprise. She didn't know what to say for a few moments. Kevin was looking at his hands again.

"Kevin, your apology means a lot to me, but no matter what your behavior, I had no right to throw the book at you."

He played with his dark tie. It flipped up and down in his hands.

"How is your head?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Did you call your mom?"

"Yeah."

Mrs. Lasko waited for him to say more. He didn't. God, she wanted to know what his mother had to say.

"I will be calling your mother tonight to talk to her."

Kevin sighed. He looked up at her. "My mom is mad at me for making you so upset."

Mrs. Lasko couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was she going to get off that easily?

"Kevin, no matter what you may have done, I should never have acted the way I did. I'll explain that to your mom

tonight."

"It won't matter. She's still gonna yell at me."

The door opened and Principal Stearner returned. She dismissed Kevin and turned to Mrs. Lasko.

"Susan, have you resolved things with Kevin?"

"I think so."

"It is true that Kevin's mother is very strict with him and feels that his behavior was wrong. But she is very upset at your loss of control in the classroom. She wants something to be done. I just don't know what to do."

Mrs. Lasko nodded. "Well, you don't need to worry," she took a deep breath, "I am resigning as of right now."

Principal Stearner sat back. "I wasn't expecting this, Susan. Are you sure this is what you want to do?"

Mrs. Lasko gave a small tight smile. "I love teaching but what I did today only proved to me what I have known for a while. I need some time for myself. I need to get back my confidence -- my control. The students deserve that from me."

She extended her hand to Principal Stearner and left the office.

Susan gathered her stuff from her classroom. She left the green good luck bear on her desk and didn't look back. She walked out of the set of double doors for the last time. She needed some time to think. The wedding would take Michael out of her life for good and she would never have to see Debbie again. She really could start over. Maybe she would stop at the mall and buy a sexy dress for the wedding. It had been so long since she had something new.

reply

the boy in the bed where i slept likes
rice. he tells me dream in the middle
of the night. we went to the museum
and saw the yale lady. i had told
him about her lecture, culture and structure
compounding in her head, dust cloud
sallow hair over high cheekbones. the
funny thing was, we had already
foreseen it.

yale lady, we are coming to you
your high ideals insulted by our present level.
we may impress you yet.

the commander-in-chief has asked; we have
already begun to deliver.

you dont see our shining house of split mind,
breathing shallow still, the god structure leaning
over our bright new kind.

I sit at a table
clean as a library
quiet as a church.
I look over at an old,
weak man.
One can learn so little
inside of such a world
it seems.
Only so much.

I see a dream of Salvador.
There the ground is never dry.
Red ground.

There is the nightmare memory--
a soldier with his bayonet.
The soldier makes a body count
by stringing the ears of the dead.
The bodies are too torn
to count.
We were born to be
the cannon fodder of the rich.
What a brainchild--the death squad.
Did you know, (I did not know), that
if you cut a man's scalp you can
peel back a man's face
like rubber?
It can be hung from a branch
like the scalp of an ancient Indian.

I am gripped by the fingers
of the filthy night, held down,
beaten senseless.

My horror-stricken eyes gaze helplessly
at the specter of my fate.
Who cares to love me now?
Who bothers to spit on my sun-burnt tongue?
I pray, clutching swollen, broken fingers,
to die fast.

Now I am dead and burned
with my throat cut like a pig.
There will always be someone
to piss on my ashes.
Here the ground is never dry
even if it does not rain.
The breath of the dead
is in our air.
The screams of the dying
try to crumble our mountains.

My dream is over.
I ran from my nightmare
and now I am home.

All that I have seen
seems ten-thousand years away
from my soft chair.
The night is quiet here,
our children are fed,
the streets are dry here
unless it rains.
My shoes are never stained red.
After bulldozed pits fill with the dead,
burnings and killings in the night.

Thomas Shu

I am back in the world I knew.

Still--I can think of nothing one man
will not do to another.

Salvador, Salvador,
--35 hundred miles south,
straight into the belly of Hell.

I hear the sound of your voice, as we walk,
the false phosphorescent glow of T.V.s flickering
in every window of the apartment buildings that rise
above us;
everyone absorbed, sucked into that pretend world of
glowing electrons.
I hear the sound of your voice but don't hear what
you're saying.

Certain words break through: *afraid, distant, dis-*
traced.

Surrounded by the city, cars, buses, trains,
people all rushing somewhere, noticing nothing.
And the sound of your voice, blending,
into the rest of the bustle of the city.

Suddenly the comfort of your monologue is gone,
I am alone and the cold breeze sweeps through me,
the T.V.s threaten me with their haunting flashes,
the cars swerve toward me and the buses belch their
exhaust into my lungs.

You were tying your shoe and catch up to me; your
voice starts again.

My feet fall heavy on the damp sidewalk,
and you take my hand, ice cold, into yours.
The warmth fights to penetrate me, but my skin is like
a wet suit,
keeping everything outside and you let go, afraid of
my cold spreading.
I look at you. You look away.

Silently we walk now.

I want to share it with you, you say after awhile. We'll share the weight.

I answer with silence, and a glance that forces you to look down,
at the ground, and I look up at the T.V.s and the cars scream by,
and the train's metallic roar rumbles somewhere in the distance.

I wander still, but now alone, as the T.V.s look down upon me.

Without the sound of your voice and the warmth of your hand,

I face the harsh city, alone and naked,
stuff my hands deep into my pockets, lean into the wind,

look straight into the headlights of the on-coming cars,
and walk on.

Dear Editor(s),

I'm very excited for this opportunity because it is very exciting. This is because writing makes me feel really, really good. I hope you like my story because I like it. I think this story "kicks ass"!!! Out of all the stories I write this story is real nice. When you read it, you should remember that I really like it and that it is a "kick ass" story.

The Author

Record

Unofficial Transcribed Recording and Evidence from Titanville School Board's Hearing Regarding the Conduct of Principal Emil Vausseul-Doffe. Recorded and edited by Tim McClay private historian. Titanville Township Center, January 17, 1996.

Examination of Mr. Vausseul-Doffe

Attorney Dugan (for the school board): All right, Mr. Vausseul-Doffe tell us about the events of October 31, 1995.

Attorney Resnick: Mr. Vausseul-Doffe has not been well since the accident. He is very shaken up. I have advised him to answer no questions until our March 5th court date.

Mr. Vausseul-Doffe (laughing or coughing): Ladies and gentlemen of the board, I have written a brief account of all of the circumstances surrounding the events that not only

offers my side of the story but also provides you with some evidence of my character as well. I have left out no pertinent information. Here are copies..."

Attorney Resnick: Emil, what are you doing?

Mr. Vausseul-Doffe: Henry, this is for the best. If you will all read along with me...

Board member (unidentified): Mr. Dugan, do you have any objections to this?

Attorney Dugan: No. Let's hear what Mr. Vausseul-Doffe has to say.

Board member: Continue, Mr. Vausseul-Doffe.

(Mr. Vausseul-Doffe begins reading from his handout.)

Vausseul-Doffe's account in full

The events you will need to consider began on Saturday, October 14, 1995. It was a cloudy day.

In my office, Mr. Andrews and his assistant Miss Cohen pulled on their sky-blue plastic body suits and fastened their masks to their hoods. Andrews reached into a cheap gym bag bearing the Pennsylvania State Seal. He pulled out two fresh, white mask filters, handed one to Miss Cohen, and then began screwing in his own.

"O.K., we're ready," said the tiny, stiff inspector with a partially muted, metallic sounding voice.

"Shouldn't I have a suit on too?," I asked.

"No that's not necessary, Mr. Vusseldorf..."

"Vausseul-Doffe."

"Pardon me." He considered trying it again but wisely checked the urge. He continued, "Only individuals who sustain direct contact or prolonged exposure to it need to be protected under current state regulations for exploratory procedures."

"Oh," I said (and thought, But it's still toxic, you buffoon).

So I directed them to the maintenance elevator and we descended to the boiler room. I hadn't been down for two years (when I had discovered the suspicious looking pipes and first alerted the state). For the most part, there wasn't much cause for an elementary school administrator to go down to the boiler room. Besides, most of our maintenance staff held animosity toward me since district cutbacks forced me to freeze their salaries for the last few years, so I rarely ventured into their domain, the underschool.

The room hadn't changed much. A quarter inch of soot on the floor, a mist of dust and dirt illuminated by a series of caged 40 watt bulbs hanging from a low rafter that stretched to a master fuse box next to the maintenance workroom door. I flipped the switch for the fluorescent ceiling lights and exposed the web of tangled pipes and the enormous heating and water distributors. I pointed to the panels and pipes I supposed to be heavily invested in asbestos and told Andrews and Cohen that I'd look for a ladder while they began their inspection.

Turning from them, I opened the workroom door with my well-labeled key (Tim is an excellent assistant-principal) and entered. To my surprise, I found Blaze Gongaware, our newest custodian (college dropout), slumped over an old drafting table that I had asked him to send to the Salvation Army. "Ladder's 'gainst 'da wall," he grunted without looking up. I was so surprised to see anyone here on a Saturday that I just took the ladder and left him to his occupation.

After making sure that Andrews and Cohen had what they needed, I headed back for my office with my handker-

chief pressed firmly over my mouth and nose (they had already begun chipping away at the pipes' coating). In my office, I tidied up the files I had been browsing before Andrews arrived and then placed them on Tim's credenza. And after sighing at the sight of Tim's empty Posture Perfect Typing Chair, I moped back into my office. The open grate on the register frightened me into reapplying the handkerchief to my nose and mouth (as a precautionary measure).

After closing the register grate, the image of Blaze slumped over that old drafting table danced into my rather active imagination (Mother said I should have been a novelist or a painter - oils not water colors). The image was rather troublesome: Blaze's tall frame bent over his task hiding it from view. Okay, maybe the image wasn't so troubling, but the circumstances were certainly peculiar. Why was he here? The maintenance staff were encouraged to put off noisy or disruptive projects until the evening or weekend, but that never seemed to matter to them before. They'd run power-drills, lawn tractors, and industrial saws whenever they'd pleased and would be gone every day by four. And I'd never seen one of them here on a Saturday before.

But Blaze's Saturday afternoon occupation wasn't a noisy project. Furthermore, he never struck me as an over-achiever. So, he must be doing something underhanded or, in the very least, acting against school policies. Therefore, with reasonable suspicion, I felt as head administrator it was my duty to investigate this possibly unsanctioned behavior acting as a deputy (of sorts) for Superintendent Grandice.

At about noon, I heard an engine sputter and then saw Blaze's filthy domestic car drift down the winding drive and turn off toward town. I grabbed my portable dictaphone and headed back to the boiler room with a clean handkerchief pressed firmly to my face. As I passed the foot of the ladder that supported Andrews and Cohen, I asked how things were coming along and in response received the typical gov-

ernmental crypticisms and flat out lies for the general public's solace. "Well the tests will let us know for sure just how dangerous this is, but it seems pretty well contained. In most cases, you'd have to basically sleep on or eat this stuff to get cancer." Sure Mr. Andrews, its safe for us to come in everyday, but meanwhile, you've been here examining these pipes for an hour-and-a-half and you insist on wearing a hooded blue plastic suit and breathing through a two-inch filter.

I entered the maintenance room, flipped on the light and closed the door behind me. The room was unseemly. Pictures, posters, and calendars of women with monstrous breasts and several feet of jagged, glossy hair. The women were either poised on top of or next to gigantic motorcycles or bright tiny cars with enormous chrome engines flowing over their hoods. Certainly the decorators of this space were secure with their masculinity.

I headed over to the drafting table. The tabletop was clear. Apparently Blaze had taken the drug paraphernalia, firearm, or piece of homemade pornography on which he was working. I gave the drawers a pull but they were all locked. I didn't recall them ever being locked when the desk was in Mr. Gower's office (I'd checked then because I'd supposed Mr. Gower, the "art" teacher, was having an affair with Ms. Podany the thrice divorced, unkept, overly flirtatious librarian, hired before I was appointed head administrator. I'd seen them coming in together in the morning. Realizing the moral obligations an elementary school has to its community, I decided to diffuse the situation to prevent the scarring of any children. A search of Gower's drafting table drawers revealed pastel-colored, letter-sized paper and Dentyne Gum -- obviously the supplies of a courter. So I used a piece of the paper and wrote a note in my best female handwriting: "F.Y.I., Luanne told me she was only seeing you for your ceramics store which she'll own one-half of in six months if she sticks to her standard schedule -- A concerned friend." Soon after they stopped arriving together and began sitting

on opposite ends of the teachers' lounge.) On second thought, Mr. Gower's drawer had been locked. I'd triggered the lock with a pewter letter opener I'd purchased in Bangladesh.

So I returned to my office, found the letter opener, and headed back down to the maintenance office. When the elevator landed in the boiler room, I found Andrews and the meek Miss Cohen gathering up their tools and meters (both were still wearing their suits while I was forced to reuse the handkerchief from my last descent).

"We're finished Mr. Vasseldauph..."

"Vausseul-Doffe."

"Yes, well, we shall be contacting your superintendent within the next four weeks with our recommendations."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime, sir?"

Such evasive tactics from these inspectors are always a sign of imminent danger so I pulled the other handkerchief from my pocket and doubled my protection while I thanked him for responding so promptly to my concerns and excused myself as they bundled up their secrets.

I entered the workroom and closed the door behind me. After a few maneuvers, I jimmied the lock of the drawer and slid it open. I removed the dictaphone from my pocket and made a quick inventory of its contents: "One box of Goobers, one nine-volt battery, several assorted pens and pencils, one small, black, leather-bound date book, one copy of Aleister Crowley's *Book Four*, one five-by-seven red, personal notebook."

Gongaware's copy of Crowley's recipes for Magik were well annotated in the margins, mostly banal summaries but some argumentative response. The date book was virtually empty except for a few appointments with various physicians and a rather ambitious reading schedule. It seemed that Mr. Gongaware was consuming at least 300 pages of text a day (mostly Gothic fiction and turn of the

century texts on witchcraft and conjuring -- both instructional and historical). There were only about twenty works total. And from a brief perusal of the date book (that stretched back for about a year-and-a-half), it seemed that he was cycling back through the reading list each time he finished it. Certainly these circumstances alone, in a just world, would have qualified as grounds for a formal investigation and possibly even dismissal. But, the notebook proved even more intriguing. It was Blaze's journal. I took the notebook upstairs and copied several of the more disturbing entries.

Mr. Gongaware: This is ridiculous. I don't have a journal and I don't know who Crowley is. What the Hell are you trying to pull here Vossel-Duff?

Mr. Vausseul-Doffe: Vausseul-Doffe.

Mr. Gongaware: What does this thing have to do with me anyway. He's the one who mutilated...

Board member: That's enough. You are not under investigation, and you will be given an opportunity to respond to any accusations made against you. But, for now, sit down and be quiet. Continue, Mr. Vausseul-Doffe.

Here are the entries I copied. I've taken the liberty of typing the handwritten portions and reproducing the drawing via the photocopier. I've attempted to remain faithful to the spatial layout of each entry while tidying up the appearance and in one instance correcting the grammar.

November 23, 1994

According to Nataf's translation of Pelodan's section of
L'Occultisme catholique:

1. Occultism is the plainest form mystery can adopt. The occult is abstract, without shape, independent of race, time, place and even of the personality of the person formulating it.

15. Analogy [translation of occult into modern exp.] proceeds from known to unknown, from body to soul, from phenomenon to numen, from man to the world and from the world to [the other], from visible to invisible and from finite to infinite.

Conclusion: I must stop counting and begin assuming, subsuming.

Jan. 13, 1995

The Invocation:

"I, (say your name), summon you, the spirit (say the name of the spirit), in the name of the great and living God, to appear to me in the shape of (say what shape the spirit is to take); if not, St. Michael the archangel, invisible, will strike you down into the depths of hell. Come therefore, (say the name of the spirit), come, come, come, to do my will." -- Colin de Plancy Dictionnaire des sciences occultes

Problem: What if spirit is one already of hell? If we invoke power of Solomon's seal as empowered by Trismegistos Hermes, we should wield power but still threat seems idle.

7-5-95 (date as per our oppressor)

Tried rat urine today. Feel no different. Will draw now.



as he visited me 6-18-95

Siá Belas

10-14-95

Note: At next council's summoning remember not to sit in front row during bokte's gaping. Ruined new shirt. Blood is irrevocable seal of resigned souls and in rayon outlasts most national brand detergents.

Furthermore, bokte became overzealous and now only has four teats.

This last entry was dated the very day I discovered the notebook. This could have been his occupation when I found him in the workroom, but I imagine he was involved in far more horrid pursuits when I confronted him.

When I emerged from the workroom, Andrews and Cohen were gone. Apparently they had shown themselves out.

For hours after my discovery, I stood in my office studying the journal. Of course, a confused, even inept, practitioner of the occult seems like an immediate threat to the moral fiber and physical well-being of the students, but unfortunately I could not pursue the matter without admitting that I had stolen private property. So, I returned the journal

to the drawer and managed to trigger the lock with the letter opener.

For the next few weeks, I kept close tabs on Mr. Gongaware. Several times each week, I checked the parking lot for Blaze's car on the weekends. Unfortunately, the greater community had been using much of the oversized lot for public parking for the youth baseball complex on the lot adjoining the school from the south, and therefore, it was often difficult to find Blaze's car among the sea of dust-covered Chevys and Fords. But (fortified by Tim's butterscotch cookies -- perfect for stakeouts) I managed to make extensive notes on the rather strange overtime hours that never appeared on Blaze's time card.

During school hours, Blaze went about his usual business. Mowing the front lawn, sweeping the gymnasium floor, cleaning the restrooms. His nonchalance was incriminating. Between jobs, he would lean against the fence beyond the playground and smoke. He was filthy. It was as though he was composed entirely of congealed greases. His thick mop of dirty motor oil colored hair did not move when he walked or in the stiff October breeze. His wiry frame was always lurched forward (even when leaning on the fence) as though the Devil had a firm grasp on the reins of Blaze's yoke. I'm not sure if I ever got a good look at his face.

I realized that unless Blaze directly violated school policies for employees or failed to complete his tasks, I had no grounds on which to fire him. Alas, his work was better than the rest of the custodial/maintenance staff and a sudden dismissal without good reason would inevitably have led to a series of debates with bullying union officials and this I strove desperately to avoid. I also feared Blaze's reaction if I would have terminated his employment. I didn't actually believe this crude sap had privy to dark powers, but I did fear his capacities for violent retaliation. But for the honor of the school, I continued my watch.

On Halloween, the students went home at lunch and

were to return at one for an afternoon party. After standing out front and greeting a few parents (who hurriedly returned their tiny Power Rangers, robots, specters, and ghouls) who shook my hand and headed back to work (these parents are the real role models for students, not the housewife / talk-show addicts at whom the children are forced to stare when not fortunate enough to be in school), Tim jogged out to alert me that Superintendent Grandice was on the phone. I hurried in. Mr. Grandice informed me that Andrews had recommended that we put off the asbestos removal until after a complete investigation this summer. "No immediate danger," Andrews had concluded. "Well painted and sealed." Obviously the state was merely saving face because in the big asbestos removal fad of the late eighties and early nineties they had somehow overlooked our school. Of course, Andrews informed me when he visited that they had a master list of the contractor's materials used and found no reason to personally investigate the school at the time. I asked him if he brought a copy of the list, and, of course, he didn't. After I hung up the phone, I closed the door and covered my nose and mouth with a fresh handkerchief.

But as I was noting in my planner that I should look into buying a small mask that I could wear in the privacy of my office to reduce my direct breathing of the tainted air, Tim rapped softly on my door and then entered and informed me that I should be aware of "a situation." Apparently, a fourth grader, Kristen Canfield, had the flu and had become ill inside of a rather elaborate costume that her father had designed and built for her. Tim related that the costume was a large alphabet block. The frame of the block was made of very thin plywood and the sides were made of posterboard reinforced by strips of balsa wood. The costume could only come off by pulling it over her head. Unfortunately, her vomit had settled in the bottom of the costume, and the teachers felt it would have been rather cruel to pull the costume over her head and force her to briefly swim in her own regurgita-

tion. So, they had cut a few larger holes around her face for fresh air and were waiting for further instructions.

When I arrived, the two fourth grade teachers were standing in the hall next to each other with their arms folded across their stomachs. The little girl in the block had collapsed against the wall. White block, red and blue gothic-style letters, short, pudgy legs in white stockings and red shoes. There was one five-inch hole in the front of the costume that Mrs. Erickson and Miss Whitehead had enlarged a bit. There were also two other small holes in the front out of which her tiny hands barely reached. The block was wet and slightly bulging at the bottom. What I could see of the little girl's face was pale and glistening with perspiration and with good cause for the smell of the vomit made me gag for a moment. I pulled the handkerchief from my pocket and covered my face. The teachers were whispering with Tim (whom they oddly find more approachable than me). As I walked over to them they ceased whispering. Mrs. Erickson said, "Blaze said he'll take care of it. He'll be right back."

"Blaze?"

"Yes. He went for some tools."

I knew I would definitely have to stay for this. After hearing briefly from the teary-eyed girl, I turned back down the hall in time to see Blaze slumping toward us. His head was bowed forward as usual and from his left hand he dangled a small hand saw. The teachers helped the block up to her feet. Blaze explained, "Okay. I'm not gonna hurt ya. I'm just gonna saw through these joints in the corner and then we'll get this thing off ya." He turned her away from him and poised his saw over the letter "B."

Suddenly, horrible images started pouring into my head. I saw Blaze draw the saw across the little girl's face. I saw him cut off her nose and then stuff it into his mouth. I knew I had to act.

"Wait!"

The hand holding the saw relaxed.

"Perhaps there is a better way. A safer way. At least we should call her parents. It is school policy to alert any and all..." Then the little block started heaving again and I was able to bide some time.

When she'd finished redecorating her container, Mrs. Erickson wiped her face with some tissue from her purse. But the tissues only disintegrated in a sloppy mess on the little girl's vomit-streaked face. She was crying now and gasping in order to inhale.

"This is inhuman," said Mrs. Erickson. She looked at Blaze. "Get her out of that thing."

As he reapproached her, for an instant, I thought I saw his face from under his hair. He was smiling. I shrieked. Everyone froze. "Let me do it. We won't have any maimed students in my school." I put out my hand and nodded toward Blaze. The saw moved slowly into my hand. Blaze took a step back and I approached the child.

I began sawing one of the seams over the letter "H." I took short, brisk strokes. As the saw hissed, I know I could hear Blaze hissing back. Chanting possibly. But each time I stopped, so did he. "Do you mind!"

"Scuse me," he innocently replied. The teachers and Tim stared.

I turned and continued. My hand was shaking a bit, but I managed to make some progress until I reached a nail or a screw. The saw screeched across the metal at the heart of the joint, and the little girl flinched. I had not steadied the block well with my left hand and as the girl rocked back the saw's tip pierced the posterboard and got caught under a piece of balsa. Apparently, the girl saw the tip of the saw coming out of the corner of her eye and began flailing and convulsing to escape it. I tried to free the saw but she was screaming and bouncing about so I was unable to remove it from the angle at which it had entered.

I have never felt that helpless before. I shouted, "Young lady, hold still. Hold still." But, she was hysterical.

Finally, she tumbled over, and I landed on top of her. The block collapsed under my weight.

By the time Mrs. Erickson and Blaze had subdued poor Kristen, she had suffered several minor lacerations about the top of her head and left side of her face, had lost that unnecessary portion of her lower left ear, and had received a large splintered wedge of balsa in her left pupil. While the others finished freeing her and rushing her off to the nurse and eventually the hospital, I sank down against the wall. He had done it. I screamed, "You won't get away with this!" While Kristen was ushered down the hall, Tim turned to me looking quite shocked. "You won't get away!" I was sobbing.

Gentle Tim raised me to my feet and helped me compose myself a bit. "It was an accident," he said and shook me a little.

"No," I gasped. "It was... he" But I realized that even Tim would find my story unbelievable at that moment.

So, I have waited until I could record the entire chain of events for an impartial audience to read and discuss. Unfortunately, I have no other evidence beyond what I have presented here. The evening after the accident, I returned to the workroom to collect Mr. Gongaware's journal, date book, and annotated copy of Aleister Crowley's *Book Four*, but the drawing table drawer had been emptied, except for the Goobers.

Mr. Gongaware: You have no right to look in my desk, you fruit. Do you all want to know what really happened? I'll tell you what really happened. A girl got sick in her costume. This nutball gets nervous and sticks a saw in her ear. End of story. The rest of this crap is a lot of smoke to cover up his mistake. I don't worship the devil; I go to the First Baptist Church on West Beau Street. Hell, I'm an usher there. I suggest you give this fool a drug test and a psychological exami-

nation because...

Mr. Vausseul-Doffe: If there is anything wrong with my mind, it is because you have drugged me.

Mr. Gongaware: He's out 'a his freakin' gourd.

Mr. Vausseul-Doffe: It is you sir who is...

Board member: (tapping his gavel) That is enough gentlemen. Mr. Dugan, do you have any questions for Mr. Vausseul-Doffe?

Attorney Dugan: I have no further questions for Mr. Vausseul-Doffe.

Board member: It is 10:40 P.M. Unless there are any immediately pressing matters, I move that we adjourn these proceedings until next Wednesday at 7:30 so that we can have some time to digest Mr. Vausseul-Doffe's...story.

(Motion passed)

U2

At the pub, dingy neon
from the Schlitz Malt Liquor bull
vaguely lights the window,
red and blue on a rainy night.
Barlight shines on the peanut basket.
A couple talks at a table in the back corner,
lips move, the shadow of hand gestures,
the silhouette of the girl as she laughs
is the only art on this decrepit wall.
Their voices are drowned out
by Neil Diamond on the juke box,
"Kentucky woman,
she shines with her own kind of light,
she'll look at you once and make a day
that's all wrong look all right."

I flick off the light in my apartment.
The screen-saver on my computer glows,
flying toasters soaring around,
shadows of light in the night.

"I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

Contributors

Angelle is a singer/songwriter/guitar player and has done this professionally for seventeen years. She frequently writes essays and poetry and has experimented some with short stories. For three years she has studied literature, philosophy and people, compiling notes towards several works. Although she'd love to remain a student forever, Angelle looks forward to being out of school so she may have time to study and write properly and to spend more time with her young son, Dakota.

Matt Bowles' illuminating and insightful biography was misplaced by our poetry editor. She has been severely reprimanded. We hear he's a swell guy.

Eileen Conner is a junior English and history major from Wilmington, North Carolina.

Heather Elworthy is a frosh from Chi-town and would like to thank her Dad and Mom for all their wishes, Nitti, Boehmer and Pendo, because she has to, and the Dolan girls for their unending hymn of praise: "Dolan rocks!"

Jamie Flannick wrote "I am...a naked silver banana relished upon by a salivating polestar tongue, oscillating agitatedly to a monotonous beat of lapping (and rather cordial) flouride atoms, looking for carnal, physical, spiritual, astronomical satiation...or maybe not," and we respect him no less.

Amy Goede is a junior English major at John Carroll. Her inspirations? Twenty-one years with a *great* (but slightly crazy) family, fifteen years of Catholic School, and five years with the Colonel -- a strange and eclectic mix of experiences.

Jason Gravelle is a less-than-prompt senior English major.

Contributors

Tanya Grossner said, "I always liked words."

Sally Joranko thanks her muses, *The John Carroll Review* staff, for their biannual inspiration.

Thomas Kahl is a sophomore at John Carroll. When he does get the chance, he enjoys writing "good" poetry. These chances do not come around often. Tom enjoys reminiscing about the 80s.

Trishalana M. Kopaitich is a senior English major who hopes to write plays, poetry, movies of the week...anything. She'd like to find a lucrative career, but she may just settle for time-stepping through her twenties. If you ever see her at a comedy club, please laugh at everything she says.

Josh Marinelli wrote:

"Melissa,

Christine said it couldn't hurt to have a few more poems for the *Quarterly*.

Bio: Josh Marinelli
graduate student -- English
hometown -- Cleveland"

Mat Marriner is a puddle.

William Pembroke is still a guitarist in the local music scene.

Misty Pomorski graduated from John Carroll with a degree in English; much to her parents' surprise, she actually got a job after college. She is working in the health care industry for Kaiser Permanente in their medicare marketing department -- see, English majors really can do just about anything. She hopes one day to devote more time to writing and to thank Mark Winegardner and George Bilgere for fueling

that desire.

Thomas Shu is a student at Cleveland State and one of Eileen Turoff's favorite people.

Michelle Tackla, a second year teaching assistant in the English Department who hopes to graduate in August, is fresh out of witty remarks.

Jane Takac is a senior English major and a friend of moomis.

Zembla is a distant northern land.

